

GRETCHEN VER. 7.0



DOWN

THE SINK DRAIN

INTRODUCTION

I realize that in writing this out for others to read I put myself at risk for being criticized for mistakes made & possibly other negative side effects but I know that I need to do this. It's a part of what has made me who I am today & I'm hoping that once this is over the devils are exorcised & I can continue moving on with my life.

It's always been said that those who don't learn from their mistakes will repeat them. This is very true. It took me many tears & many dope slaps to my forehead for me to really learn what I needed to from the bad things that happened & the mistakes I made. If I could, would I go back & change things? Some things I might change, but overall I think that in order to be happy sometimes you have to suffer in the process of personal growth. I'm hoping that the worst is far, far behind me though. I'm getting too old for this.

Names have been changed to protect the private & the assholes.

FALL BACKWARDS IN TIME

It's 1997 & I'm 21 years old. I'm in college & working at the same restaurant I've worked at since I was 17. I have a boyfriend, for the purposes of this I'll call him Joe, & we've been together since fall of 1995. I'm living at home with my mother & younger brother but that's about to change because she's getting remarried & will be moving in with her husband. I can't

really afford to pay for my own apartment working on tips & there's no room for me in the house my mother is going to move into. I have to find a roommate but none of the girls I know are responsible enough to pay rent sadly. Not knowing many people outside of work I pose the question to my mother of Joe moving in. She frowned upon this idea, being a conservative Christian & not wanting her daughter "living in sin." The idea of him moving in was sheerly out of convenience though; it wasn't like we were trying to make a big step in the relationship. Moving in with a boyfriend out of convenience is always a bad idea. But after a few months my mom saw that it was either let me live there alone & footing more of the house payment or let Joe move in. Because we're not independently wealthy she agreed to the request & pretty soon Joe & I were living together. This begins the period where I don't have very many specific memories.

Joe had something to do outside of the house and work; he had a few friends & a hobby. I didn't really care to go sit on a sidewalk alone & watch Joe & his friends skate so I didn't. Instead I stayed at home by myself. In high school I had always worked & wasn't allowed to go out much, so really I didn't have a lot of friends outside of work. The friends I did have had started moving on with their lives, in most cases that meant moving out of town as well. So as sad as it seems on my part I spent lots of time sleeping. This was the beginning of my depression.

This was also the beginning of the routine of work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep, etc. I had

stopped writing; I'd stopped being interested in things I used to enjoy doing, the few things that they were.

STATIC

Looking back I can't imagine how I spent so much time with someone & we never really knew each other. I suppose in order to know someone else you have to know yourself & at that time I really didn't have a clue what that meant.

On one occasion Joe told me that he wanted me to be more of a housekeeper type so that's what I started trying to be, more docile & domestic even though I hated cleaning. Cleaning is a never-ending job too, one of which I still detest. But the strange thing is that over time I stopped really doing that & let him once my asthma started bothering me more. In the bed I lay for hours and hours in front of a television screen watching nothing.

There was always a friction between us that I think started when we had first gotten together, well a few months into the relationship & I being the one who blindly trusts, took up for Joe when my friend came to me to inform me that he was smoking weed with some people in his class but that he'd told them to not tell me. If he'd come to me & said that he did that & would be doing that I wouldn't have had a problem with it. But right after I told my friend she was crazy for saying such a thing I found out that he was doing it. I also believe that my mistrust of Joe came from his statement, "It's not lying if you don't

ask me about it." It's no surprise that what I ended up doing after this was asking him lots of questions on a regular basis. It was stupid, insecure, and immature of me to do this, but I didn't like how I felt after I found out my friend was right with her suspicion. I felt stupid, naïve, like I had egg on my face. And I wanted to avoid that feeling again at all costs. Even if it meant pestering him with questions. I never got past him lying to me about his drug use.

Joe started developing hobbies that would keep him at home more, but were also so time consuming it wasn't like we'd be spending time together. And so we grew more apart as the years wore on. Life for a long time was a big routine that I could never break out of. I was desperate for change, I changed majors in college, I changed jobs after college, but nothing seemed to help whatever it was inside of me crying out to be let go.

As time wore on I swam further and further inside myself, unable to share anything with anyone. I lost interest in sex. I lost interest in holding hands. I'd fallen out of love but didn't know what to do about it. By the time I realized what had happened it was years later & we'd signed a mortgage together, again out of financial convenience. We'd been together over 5 years and were no closer to marriage than we'd been at the beginning.

There was a static between us, a tension stemming from a plethora of things that had been said or unsaid over the years. We couldn't talk to each other about anything political or

religious. I always felt like my opinions were disregarded and he was trying to force me to see things his way. After awhile of dealing with these kinds of "discussions" I made the subconscious decision that it was best just to keep my mouth shut. There were things, such as my pro-choice beliefs, that were questioned with, "Did you have an abortion? Is that why you think that way?" And when I told him "no" once he didn't believe me.

Enter deafening silence.

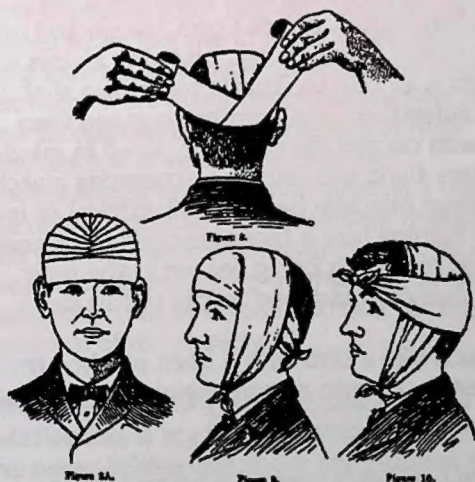
When you don't have many friends to turn to & you know that everyone is busy with their own lives & all YOU have is that relationship, it's scary to think about trying to be alone. Silence when someone is in the house with you, even if it's uncomfortable silence, appears better to some than speaking out & knowing that no one will hear you because NO ONE IS THERE. I suppose that's what co-dependency is all about. I was afraid of being alone. I received much criticism later on for this, but when you've never had to deal with it & you're not even sure of who you are or what you would do with yourself alone it can be a terrifying thought.

I've always had the problem of avoiding things that scare me or are too confrontational.

It wasn't like we didn't know there were problems. When we did speak most of the time it was to fight for a long period, before we just gave up. I thought that I could somehow make it work. In the end, I couldn't. This was a major set-back for me, as I believe I have some sort of Anne Sullivan complex at times, wanting to fix

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everyone and everything around me. This is why I went into social work & then went into special education. This is why when I sense that someone is in pain I try to ease that pain by letting him or her know that I care. Instead of trying to put bandages on everyone around me what I should've been doing was bandaging myself.



CAGED

Skip ahead to two years ago because really nothing of importance happened during the in-between time. I had started talking to old elementary school friends again, one of whom I would've hung out with more had I not had to

answer questions about what we were doing when I told him we were just going shopping. I was also prohibited from going to any bars & if I'd wanted to eat dinner with someone other than him it became a scene because he felt that all we had was dinner.

I didn't even feel really badly that I wanted to spend time away from him. I needed some human interaction where I could laugh and smile and be happy about things. And girls always need girl friends to talk to. That's something that Joe never understood. Me wanting to spend time with Gwen caused many a fight. Keep in mind that every fight was usually a screaming match that turned into him being loudly critical of me, and me turning into a teenager crying in a corner while her mother is being beaten in the next room. I cannot stand loud voices to this day.

I was much like a bird who'd been plucked from the forest & put into a cage. Helpless, defeated, volatile.

And since I couldn't leave the house I made friends the only way possible which was through the beauty of the internet. I know there is still a pretty large stigma around this area about people talking to people over the internet. They think everyone who's on aim or on online communities is a psycho & therefore you should never "talk" to anyone online. While there are some freaks & crazies out there, I'm lucky not to have had any bad experiences as a result of this. The first community I joined online was bmezine's iam community. I stumbled across the site one day while looking at photos of tattoos &

piercings. I was reluctant to put up any photos of myself, even of just my head at first, but then I decided that since I wouldn't be giving out any identifying personal information that I'd be alright.

I spent a lot of time on ian looking at people's pages & reading their journals. A lot of them seemed to be like me in many ways, aside from being interested in body modification I noticed that there were many people there who had gone through similar experiences in their relationships or who were creative misunderstood types in their reality. I think that one of the downfalls of developing friendships in that fashion, aside from running the risk of people misrepresenting themselves, is the realization that everyone you talk to lives hundreds of miles away.

The breakdown of communication in the relationship & my fear of being yelled at led to me never telling Joe about my internet friends. At this point I was just talking to people about everyday things & getting tips on healing piercings & tattoos. This might've been part of what helped me snap out of that long winter. I know it's wrong to keep things like that a secret. Like I said, many of the mistakes I made in the relationship I would not do again. Had I not been so afraid of being chastised I wouldn't have been dishonest to begin with. As long as he wasn't asking it wasn't really lying, according to his own philosophy, right?

With very few exceptions I hadn't traveled much in my life. I'd been to Pennsylvania with a church group & to Florida & Tennessee on different occasions as well as a few other states, but it had been a very long time since I'd been anywhere new. I'd talked to a girl whom I will call Alice for months. We clicked almost instantly, even though online, & she'd been asking me to visit her in Rhode Island for quite a long time. I knew that Joe would have big problems with me going out of town without him. And seeing how this would be my first time meeting Alice, I wanted to go alone anyway to have some girl time & see a little more of the country without having to censor myself for Joe trying to say that I was being phony or acting strange. I suppose it would be strange for him to have seen me happy after seeing me sad for so long. But I was really just sad at home.

In March of 2003 I decided that I was going to Rhode Island. This was a big deal for me for many reasons, other than the reasons already discussed-I was afraid of heights & since there's such a long distance between RI & VA I was going to fly there. At this point I'd never even been inside an airport so the whole concept was intimidating. Especially because I over think everything. "What do I do with my bags? Can I carry-on this or that? Where do I go once I get inside the layover airport?" I was asking these questions weeks before the actual trip.

As the date of the trip neared I grew more & more anxious. I didn't want to tell Joe I was going because I knew we would end up fighting. And after years and years of witnessing fighting

at home growing up the sound of yelling or even slightly raised voices makes me feel sick & knots up my stomach. My defense is to avoid. So I did a very cowardly but I felt necessary thing & waited until the last minute to tell him I was going. And of course it caused a fight. I was hoping that it would end up with him being so mad that he left me. Otherwise I knew I wouldn't be able to get out. He has always told me I will never be able to get away from him. It's a strange feeling to know that someone wants you there so much that they're willing to be unhappy just to have *someone* in their life. Think about the kid who catches the firefly & in wanting to keep it they end up squeezing too hard & the firefly dies.

Sometimes you have to let things go. In April 2002 I'd broken up with Joe but it only lasted a few weeks. I think in the end his following me around questioning my motives & refusing to accept that I wasn't happy along with my fear of being alone, because I had heard that that's what would become of me, I took him back.

But I digress. I went to RI & had a great time, but it was only for a weekend. I'd had a taste of freedom though & it was delicious. Virginia didn't seem the same to me once I returned. In a small way I felt more alive inside, but then I'd have to realize that the freedom & peace that I felt the moment the plane took off was momentary in the grand scheme of things. Life back on the farm, the figurative farm, was hell upon my return. Everything I did was cause for a barrage of questions. He'd figured out that I was talking to people online but I'd just snarkily deny it or tell him to fuck off, especially when he'd do

things like stand outside my office window & try to peer through the closed blinds to see the computer monitor. We got into screaming matches almost on a daily basis. Keep in mind at this time he was already pretty much sleeping on the couch nightly so the relationship had deteriorated beyond repair.

I couldn't take it anymore, the constant fighting and walking on eggshells, even though part of my daily life, weren't very pleasant to deal with.

THE BITTERSWEET SUMMER OF 2008



I had been with Joe for over 7 years, most of that time spent as two people living together who loved each other as people but were not in love with each other. There is a distinction, you know. By this time I had grown to detest being anywhere near him because of the way he purposely said hateful things just to hurt me & how he refused to leave me alone.

I had been a friend with someone for many months, longer than I'd known Alice, & I felt that it was a good idea to finally, now that I could, go visit him. This would involve more air travel & more money spent. At the time I was more concerned with getting out of Danville than being worried about the consequences of my reckless actions.

When I was a child I'd use my imagination as an escape from stressful situations. Leaving Virginia to visit this friend was something like that in that I could go far away from my problems where I could just be myself & not have to worry about money or fighting for a few days. I could be whomever I wanted to be, and that was Jennifer.

In hindsight I can say that really I just wanted to be wanted, to not be alone. I know how wonderful of a person I can be, and I don't really understand why I would be rejected. But when you really have nothing in common with someone & you know that it doesn't feel right then it's not right. This hurt me but I know that it worked out the way that it needed to. The extremely sad part of this chapter is that it took me way too long to realize that it was mostly smoke & mirrors & daydreaming. This is not real.

And of course each time I came home there were just more arguments about the house, Joe refusing to respect a closed door, & plenty of yelling. At this point he took apart the office furniture, which was his, and sat it dismantled in the living room where it remained for over a year in that state. He also took apart my computer thinking I wouldn't be able to put it back

together. These are the actions of someone so willing to keep someone inside a box that they're willing to let them remain dead inside. That's not love.

Living with your ex is a bad, bad scene.

DOWN THE SINK DRAIN

The home situation got no better. If it weren't for my cats, dogs, rabbits, & the fact that the land on which the house was placed was mine, I would've moved out. Joe had tons of reptiles & a point to make so he stayed there as well. I'd long since run out of money & the desire to fly away. I had started writing again, which kept me busy for a while. I had no clue where to go in this town to meet anyone, that's the beauty of small town USA. The people I did meet, who were few and far between, I didn't seem to connect with. I can't fake that sort of thing either like some people seem to be able to. So I stuck with my online friends.

It was through my writing that I ended up talking to Jason, also not his real name. This was a guy who lived in Virginia although two hours away from my town. He seemed like a nice guy, he read my stories & gave me feedback on them & we gave each other advice on things. He seemed harmless & nice. Not at all smarmy like some of the other people in my life. So we became what I thought were close friends.

At this point I got tired. I was tired of fighting & scared. Something in my brain believed Joe when

he said that no one else would ever love me. Look at what had already happened. As stupid as it was, I bought into what I was being sold. And then I ended up saying that Joe could stay. It just seemed easier. Nothing really changed though, we still fought constantly. I even took him with me to NJ to meet Alice, who had moved since the previous March. We argued the entire 7 hours of the drive almost & he stayed pissed off the whole time we were there. Part of the pissiness was probably justified but irregardless it was plain to see that this was never going to work. And so after Christmas we broke it off for the last time. But that wasn't the end.

2. If you could read my journal during this period you would see that I spent a lot of time writing about the fighting and what it was doing to me emotionally. But things that shouldn't have kept me in it kept me in it, responsibilities.

Through the beauty of technology I finally met someone in my own town, a girl who had similar musical & movie tastes. This girl became my only girl friend in town for a while & a source of support when I needed it the most.

I'm getting ahead of myself though. In between the time I met Jane & the end of winter 2004 I ended up in a relationship with Jason. I hadn't pushed for a relationship with him at all; it was his idea. I felt like I might've found something good, but when I would go visit him I never felt right. It seemed like we were fine, then I would go home & things would be different. He didn't call as much. I worried because I knew the kind of lifestyle he lived, which involved heavy

drinking, & lots of drugs & I didn't want him to end up getting hurt. I trusted him. I believed him when he said that he loved me & when he said that everything was alright. I gave him every chance to tell me if there was a problem or if he wasn't happy with how things were, but all I got was constant reassurance that it was all in my head. If you read the first issue of gretchen, "relationshit" was based on this relationship. I would sit at Jane's house & pitifully wait for the phone to ring because he said he'd call, only most of the time he didn't call. He made me feel crazy because I always had this gut feeling that the whole thing was going to fall apart at any moment. I would drive to visit him; he never made the effort to visit me. That was pretty logical seeing as how Joe was still living in the house. That wasn't really an issue because of that. It was mostly the phone calls, or lack of phone calls, the fact that he didn't seem to think I should have a problem with a girl whom he used to have a crush on coming to visit him for a weekend, and how when we were together all he wanted to do was go drinking with his friends. I'm not much of a drinker, I'll admit that. I always felt that the fact that I didn't drink much made him think that I wasn't much "fun." That probably had something to do with the fact that I was always feeling like he was lying to me about loving me. So one night after about five rum and vodka concoctions I drank a whole fifth of Hpnotiq at his apartment & passed out while he was next door playing video games. The next day I was more ill than I'd felt in years. That was a brilliant idea in hindsight. Just to prove that I could drink and keep up with him, jeez what a moron I was.

I would sit at the apartment & imagine things like picturing my life as a movie, a split-screen film with one side being that of what was going on in Danville & the other being me living a different reality in Richmond. I knew that this wasn't real either. But I detested everything that "home" meant to me & desperately wanted change. But at what cost?

I was an anxious wreck in winter 2003, living life waiting by a cell phone that never rang, my stomach upset all the time. I lost a great deal of weight during that time. I knew something was wrong. So I went to the doctor & got anti-depressants, treating some of the symptoms but not part of the cause.

Then finally one day about a month or so into the relationship Jason & I were talking on an instant messenger service, of all things, when he finally tells me that he felt like something was missing between the two of us & that while he thought he loved me when he told me that at first he wasn't so sure now. Oddly enough he'd told me he loved me during the same conversation not ten minutes earlier. I felt like my heart had just been ripped out. What he'd done was far worse than what the previous male friend had done; at least that person never lied about his feelings for me. I knew how he felt so it was my problem that I kept allowing the situation to continue. Jason could've spared me pain but instead he chose to look out for himself first & avoid telling me he didn't really love me. I think he was trying to make himself love me, but that didn't work.

Never again will I ignore that little voice inside me.

By the way, that girl friend of his that was going to visit cancelled on him again. I don't know the specifics of what went on with him over the next couple of months but from what I gather it was him doing lots of drinking & being involved with a girl who wouldn't sleep with him and encouraged him to have sex with other girls. And he wasn't too thrilled with that idea.

Thanks, karma.


Finally I figured out that a relationship wasn't going to make me happy, that I had to find my own happiness. You can't base your life satisfaction around one person or thing because eventually you won't have that in your life anymore. Then what?


That's when I got the idea to write my own zine, by the way, when I gave up on finding someone to share meaningful things with. I was jaded, but in a cautious way. The romantic side of me went into hibernation. It seemed like there were no males left who even had a sense of what it meant to care about someone else, at least not in my world.

I was able to write about the events of the next few months, although not in much detail, in previous issues so I won't rehash that.



There are some people in this world who are just not ready for anything of substance. That's just the way it is. Don't waste your time on them; let them find someone else with no substance.

 Sometimes the best things will fall into your lap when you're least expecting them.


 Friends will come & go & sometimes screw you over; but non-blood related brothers & sisters are hard to find so cherish that family & be lucky you have them.

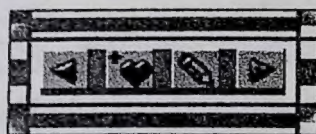
ARE WE THERE YET?

You would think that six months after the break-up Joe would've been out of the house, but that's not so. It seems like one thing after another had kept him here, plans falling through, inability to refinance because we need an appraisal & we can't do that until he's out so the house can be straightened up. Yes, until yesterday the dismantled office furniture was still in the living room.

To give you an idea of the climate, here is a livejournal entry I wrote on the matter.



how scandanavian of me (
kiss theasphalt) wrote,
@ 2004-07-18 12:44:00



This is getting ridiculous. I mean it's way beyond ridiculous. If it weren't for effexor I'd probably be crying in a fetal position on the floor from stress.

****, hopefully, will be out of here either today or

tomorrow. I came in and he said he wouldn't give me the money he owes me until he got a letter saying that he has been asked to leave. I typed up a letter but my mom's telling me not to give it to him.

**** also said he's taking the faucets from the bathrooms because his grandpa bought them for him. Actually he bought them for the both of us so I said that he couldn't have the ones in my bathroom. He started being petty then, making a joke about my weight and calling me petty. Who's trying to take the faucets off the sink again?

So him, his grandpa, his drunk of a father, grandmother, and aunt are here taking things out. I see no reason why they shouldn't be able to get it all today. So I asked him for his keys to the house. He said "that's not going down. my name is still on this house." But he's vacating the premises today. Whatever. If I wanted to really press things I could go buy new locks this evening.

I'm sorry to have to bring this shit up again. It's lame and hopefully will be over soon...

So am I there yet? I don't know. I know that I'm so much stronger & better off than I was a year ago at this time. The medicine has helped with how I handle stress & I still face low points but that's life, you have good days & bad. I think it's safe to say that it's more like good days & here & there bad hours more than whole bad days & I haven't always been able to say that.

I've learned from my mistakes & am holding on to more mature ideals. Meaningless sex is something that I never wish to have again, and I never want to be reduced to waiting around for a man to decide whether or not he wants me.

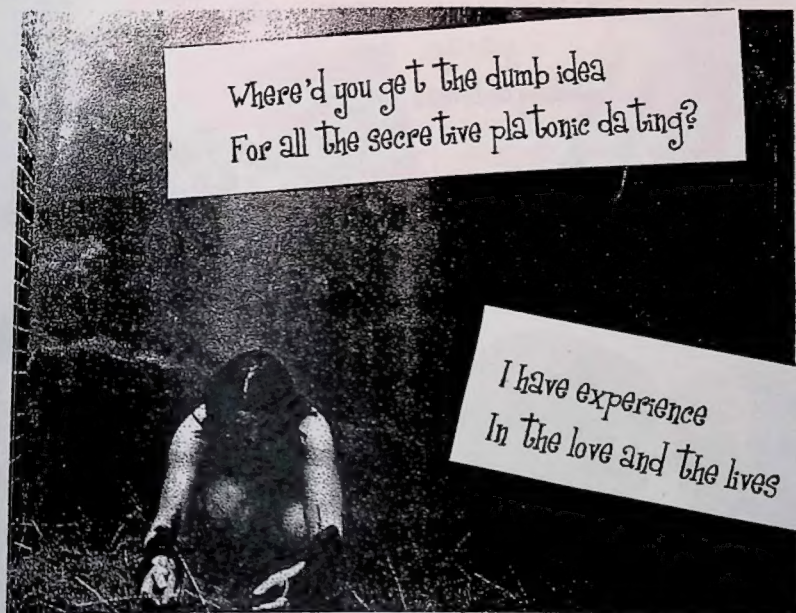
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somehow I wrote all this & left out the parts about the domestic violence. I didn't even realize I'd done that.

While I know that I should come to certain revelations on my own, hearing Scott tell me to love myself & care about myself did me a world of good a few months ago. I haven't really cared about myself in years.

I love & am loved.

"I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, & doggone it people like me." (-from the Daily Affirmations SNL skit.)



Of Man and Machine.

Yo no comprendo, mi amour.

Oh no, yo no comprendo.

The New Best Friend, The Olde Headboard.

[rasputina lyrics]

